

to have President Clinton among us here and among the Palestinian people.

I was hoping that logistically we would have been able to have a motorcade, because people are lined up waiting to greet President Clinton on both sides of the road. And I believe perhaps you took a glimpse of the people, flying in the chopper over Gaza, standing on both sides hoping that the motorcade would come by—from the airport, from the airport. [*Laughter*]

**President Clinton.** I would like to say just one other thing. There are two historic elements to this day. One is the opportunity that I have been given simply to come here and to have this meeting and to be a part of the airport dedication. The other is the truly historic meeting that the Chairman has convened of the PNC, the PCC, and the other Palestinian groups, and the opportunity that the Palestinian people, through their elected representatives, will have to make it clear and unequivocal that they are choosing the path of peace and partnership with Israel, and that we hope—I think all of us hope—that this will lead to a changing of hearts and minds throughout this region among all parties, so that it will be easier for everyone to implement the difficult commitments they have made at Wye and will have to make to get the final status talks completed.

This is a truly significant thing, and I, for one, very much appreciate it. It was a part of the Wye River agreements; it showed a lot of courage on Chairman Arafat's part; and I was delighted to be invited here. And so I just want to say how much I personally appreciate this and how much I think it will mean over the long run to the prospects for a successful peace agreement.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12 noon in Chairman Arafat's office. In his remarks, the President referred to the Palestine National Council (PNC) and the Palestinian Central Council (PCC). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

## **Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by Chairman Arafat in Gaza City**

*December 14, 1998*

Chairman Arafat, Mrs. Arafat, distinguished leaders of the Palestinian community, colleagues, and friends: On behalf of my family and our entire delegation, we thank you for your warm and truly memorable welcome.

Mr. Chairman, as I promised you at Wye River, I have come to Gaza to speak about the benefits of peace based on mutual respect. I know that the circumstances you've faced since 1993 and the signing of the peace have remained difficult, but there are reasons for hope. For the first time in the history of the Palestinian movement, the Palestinian people and their elected representatives now have a chance to determine their own destiny on their own land.

I am proud to be the first American President to stand with the Palestinian people here as you shape your future. I want to emphasize that that future is possible because of the commitment you have made to live in peace and mutual respect with your neighbors, side by side.

All this would have been hard to imagine in the darkest years of struggle, when most people expected the Middle East would always be a separate set of armed camps. Sometimes it takes more courage and more strength to make peace than it does to continue war. I thank Chairman Arafat for having the strength, the courage, and the wisdom to make peace and then to persevere on the path of peace.

I thank the Chairman and, indeed, all Palestinians who embrace the idea that Palestinians and Israelis can share the land of their fathers together. I thank you for believing that the land which gave the world Islam and Judaism and Christianity can be the home of all people who love one God and respect every life our one God has created.

America wants you to succeed, and we will help you to create the society you deserve, a society based on respect for human rights,

human dignity, the rule of law, a society that teaches tolerance, values education, and now, at last, has the chance to unleash the creative power of its people against the destructive pull of hopelessness and poverty.

I think of you at this hopeful moment as a family reuniting after too many years of dislocation and despair; a community of believers helping to build a Middle East in which people of all faiths can live in security and peace; a people known through the world, like the olive tree, for your attachment to this land and now to peace; a society that demands of yourselves what you rightly demand of others.

The way ahead may be hard and uncertain, but the way you have left behind is full of self-defeating violence and soul-withering hate. So we have no choice but the way ahead.

Tomorrow my family and I, along with Chairman and Mrs. Arafat, will have a chance to visit Bethlehem, to light the Christmas tree at the beginning of this season which is so important for those of us who are Christians. The next time people celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem we will be on the edge of a new millennium, marking 2000 years since the birth of the Christ child, who became known to Christians as the Prince of Peace, who happened to be a Jew, who happens to be recognized by Islam.

Now, if all that can be true, surely we can figure out how to solve these problems and go into the future.

I close with these words of the poet, Hafez Ibrahim:

People of a hopeful future, we are in need of leadership which builds and people who construct.

People of a hopeful future, we are in need of wisdom that counsels and a hand that liberates.

People of a hopeful future, we need you; fill the void, get to work.

People of a hopeful future, do not let tomorrow pass like yesterday, in dusty existence.

People of a hopeful future, your country implores you to think. God willing, we will think and feel and act as one.

Thank you. And thank you again.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. at the Zahrat Al Madian. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Arafat's wife, Shua. The transcript made available by the Office of Press Secretary also included the remarks of Chairman Arafat.

### **Remarks to the Palestine National Council and Other Palestinian Organizations in Gaza City**

*December 14, 1998*

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Za'anoun, Chairman Arafat, Mrs. Arafat, members of the Palestinian National Council, the Palestinian Central Council, the Palestinian Executive Committee, Palestinian Council Heads of ministries, leaders of business and religion; to all members of the Palestinian community, and to my fellow Americans who come here from many walks of life—Arab-American, Jewish-American—this is a remarkable day. Today the eyes of the world are on you.

I am profoundly honored to be the first American President to address the Palestinian people in a city governed by Palestinians.

I have listened carefully to all that has been said. I have watched carefully the reactions of all of you to what has been said. I know that the Palestinian people stand at a crossroads: behind you a history of dispossession and dispersal, before you the opportunity to shape a new Palestinian future on your own land.

I know the way is often difficult and frustrating, but you have come to this point through a commitment to peace and negotiations. You reaffirmed that commitment today. I believe it is the only way to fulfill the aspirations of your people, and I am profoundly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Chairman Arafat for the cause of peace, to come here as a friend of peace and a friend of your future, and to witness you raising your hands, standing up tall, standing up not only against what you believe is wrong but for what you believe is right in the future.

I was sitting here thinking that this moment would have been inconceivable a decade ago: no Palestinian Authority; no elections in Gaza and the West Bank; no relations between the United States and Palestinians;